

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 IO-13 EB-08 TRSE-00 /079 W
-----211808Z 047097 /50

R 211628Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2907
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
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USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, PINT, UK, EEC
SUBJECT: DIRECT ELECTIONS: WHITE PAPER DEBATE OPENS

REF: LONDON 5673

SUMMARY. THE DEBATE ON THE GOVERNMENT'S WHITE PAPER FOR
DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT BEGAN
APRIL 20 AND WILL CONCLUDE APRIL 25. FOREIGN SECRETARY
OWEN TOLD COMMONS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL TAKE NOTE
OF VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THE DEBATE IN PREPARING DRAFT
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LEGISLATION AND ESCHEWED ANY COMMITMENTS AS TO THE
ELECTORAL SYSTEM TO BE USED OR DUAL MANDATE. HE DID.
HOWEVER, INTIMATE THAT IT WAS TILTING TOWARD A SYSTEM OF
PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION (PR). CONSERVATIVE SPOKES-
MAN DAVIES TOO AVOIDED STAKING OUT A POSITION ON THE
ELECTORAL ISSUE AND ANNOUNCED THAT TORIES WILL ALLOW A
FREE VOTE ON THIS QUESTION. FORMER OARTY LEADERS

HEATH AND THORPE BOTH ENDORSED PR AND REJECTED COMPULSORY DUAL MANDATE, WHILE THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY (SNP) SPOKESMAN RESERVED THAT PARTY'S POSITION. A FEW LABOR BACK-BENCHERS INSISTED ON REOPENING THE DEBATE ON BRITISH MEMBERSHIP. BUT GENERAL SENTIMENT IN THE COMMONS SEEMED STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF DIRECT ELECTIONS, IF FAIRLY EVENLY DIVIDED ON THE PR ISSUE. OUR READING OF CURRENT PARLIAMENTARY SENTIMENT SUGGESTS THAT THE PROSPECTS FOR APPROVAL OF A PR ELECTORAL SYSTEM HAVE IMPROVED SHARPLY OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS. THOUGH THE ODDS STILL FAVOR A SIMPLE MAJORITY SYSTEM. END SUMMARY.

1. FOREIGN SECRETARY DAVID OWEN OPENED THE TWO-DAY DEBATE ON THE DIRECT ELECTIONS WHITE PAPER (REFTEL) APRIL 20 -- THE SECOND DAY OF DEBATE IS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 25. OWEN, A STRONG PRO-EUROPEAN, AVOIDED MAKING ANY COMMITMENTS REGARDING THE TWO ISSUES LEFT UNRESOLVED BY THE WHITE PAPER -- THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM TO BE USED AND COMPULSORY DUAL MANDATE -- STRESSING THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S FINAL LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS WOULD REFLECT THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED DURING THE DEBATE. WHILE THE BULK OF HIS STATEMENT DEALT WITH THE PROSPECTS FOR A FEDERAL EUROPE -- AN UNLIKELY EVENTUALITY DURING THE LIFETIME OF HIS CHILDREN OR GRANDCHILDREN. HE AVERTED -- THOSE WHO LISTENED CLOSELY WERE ABLE TO DISCERN EVIDENCE OF A GOVERNMENT TILT TOWARD A PR SYSTEM. "IT WOULD BE DAMAGING TO BRITISH DEMOCRACY". HE SAID, "IF THE ELECTIONS PRODUCED UNREPRESENTATIVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MEMBERS AFTER A LOW OR UNREPRESENTATIVE POLL".

2. CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN JOHN DAVIES, WHILE DEMANDING THAT THE GOVERNMENT MAKE ITS PREFERENCE ON THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM CLEAR, SKILLFULLY MANAGED TO AVOID TIPPING THE OPPOSITION'S HAND ON THIS QUESTION. HE DID, HOWEVER, MAKE ONE UNEXPECTED ANNOUNCEMENT -- LIKE THE GOVERNMENT, THE TORY LEADERSHIP HAS DECIDED TO ALLOW A FREE VOTE ON THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM ISSUE. THE CONSERVATIVES, THOUGH, WILL OPPOSE ANY EFFORT TO MAKE MEMBERSHIP IN THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT A PREREQUISITE FOR ELECTION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (COMPULSORY DUAL MANDATE).

3. THE MOST NOTEWORTHY SPEECH OF THE DAY WAS THAT OF FORMER CONSERVATIVE LEADER EDWARD HEATH. NOT UNEXPECTEDLY, HE CAME OUT STRONGLY FOR PR AND SUGGESTED THAT MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT BE ALLOWED TO SIT AND SPEAK. BUT NOT TO VOTE, IN COMMONS WHEN EC-RELATED MATTERS WERE BEING DISCUSSED. FORMER LIBERAL

LEADER JEREMY THORPE, SPEAKING FOR HIS PARTY, REJECTED ANY SIMPLE MAJORITY ("FIRST-PAST-THE-POST") ELECTORAL SYSTEM. THE SNP SPOKESMAN RESERVED HIS PARTY'S POSITION ON ELECTORAL OPTIONS BUT INDICATED THEY WOULD ACCEPT EITHER PR OR THE SIMPLE MAJORITY.

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4. OTHER BACKBENCH SPEAKERS -- EXCEPT FOR A FEW UN-REpentant LABOR ANTI-MARKETEERS WHO SOUGHT TO REOPEN THE ISSUE OF BRITISH MEMBERSHIP -- SUPPORTED DIRECT ELECTIONS, WERE FAIRLY EVENLY DIVIDED ON THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM QUESTION AND OVERWHELMINGLY OPPOSED COMPULSORY DUAL MANDATE.

5. COMMENT: THE MOST IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT ON THE
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FIRST DAY WAS CLEARLY THE TORY LEADERSHIP'S DECISION TO
ALLOW A FREE VOTE ON THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM. MRS.
THATCHER IS KNOWN TO BE STRONGLY OPPOSED TO PR, BUT
APPARENTLY BECAME RECONCILED TO THE FREE VOTE BY
VIRTUE OF HER DESIRE TO AVOID AN OPEN SPLIT IN HER
PARTY AT THIS TIME. WITH THE GOVERNMENT LEANING TOWARD
THE REGIONAL LIST PR SYSTEM, BUT IN SOME DANGER OF A
CABINET SPLIT IF THIS OPTION IS INCORPORATED IN ITS
ELECTIONS BILL, THE CONSERVATIVE ACTION SEEMS TO HAVE
GREATLY IMPROVED THE CHANCES COMMONS WILL APPROVE A
PR SYSTEM. IN THIS REGARD, WE HAVE RECENTLY NOTED A
PERCEPTIBLE CHANGE IN LEFT-WING LABOR ATTITUDES TOWARD
PR. THEIR OPPOSITION TO PR HAS MODERATED APPRECIABLY,
IN LARGE PART DUE TO THEIR GROWING REALIZATION THAT
THE LEFT-WING DOMINATED NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
(NEC) WOULD HAVE A STRONG, AND POSSIBLY DECISIVE,
VOICE IN THE SELECTION OF CANDIDATES FOR THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT UNDER EITHER OF THE NATIONAL OR REGIONAL
LIST PR SYSTEMS. THIS SAME REALIZATION HAS TENDED TO
COOL THE ARDOUR OF SOME RIGHT-WING PROPONENTS IN
THE LABOR PARTY AND GOVERNMENT. THE NET RESULT OF THESE
DEVELOPMENTS HAS BEEN TO FURTHER ENHANCE THE POSSIBILITY
THAT COMMONS WILL APPROVE A PR SYSTEM FOR THE EC ELEC-
TIONS. HOWEVER, WE STILL BELIEVE THE ODDS FAVOR
ADOPTION OF A SIMPLE MAJORITY SYSTEM WITH ALL ITS
INHERENT DELAYS.

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